MEP National Network™

GEORGIA SUCCESS STORY

HIGH-QUALITY YARN MANUFACTURER UN-TANGLES PROBLEM

ABOUT BUHLER QUALITY YARNS. Based in Jefferson, Georgia, Buhler Yarns is a yarn manufacturer and a supplier to the sheeting industry hubs in Alabama and North Carolina. The company was established in 1995 and has since grown to around 135 employees. In reaction to changes in the market and customer demand, Buhler started making knitting yarns with long and extra-long staple cotton, designed for apparel. The company became a licensed "Supima" cotton processor and also began experimenting with innovative new fiber blends.

THE CHALLENGE. As demand for products made with the softer long-staple cotton and fiber blends grew, Buhler slowly increased production, utilizing equipment and processes designed for their original yarns. Although the approach was working, company leaders knew that they were not producing at full-capacity due to an issue with the bobbins. These bobbins–spools that hold the yarn during spinning–were falling over and causing the machines to stop until an employee could rectify the situation and re-start the machine. As Vice President of Operations, Russell Mims was aware of this issue and had been trying to think of solutions. He met Bill Nusbaum, Northeast Georgia Region Manager for the Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership (GaMEP), part of the MEP National Network™, at a GaMEP Manufacturing Growth Meeting in Jefferson. Nusbaum agreed to visit the plant and offer his assistance.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. After observing the problem at the Buhler plant, Nusbaum recommended a GaMEP problem solving event for the company. Mims asked three employees from different departments across the organization to participate in the event in addition to himself. Nusbaum, along with GaMEP project manager Damon Nix, coached the team through a four-step problem solving method with applications for observing the problem, brainstorming ideas, prioritizing ideas based on a number of different factors, and creating a plan of action. After the event, GaMEP instructed the team to systematically apply each suggested solution and report back on their progress.

Within a few weeks, the team had identified the problem: a system of blowers that rotated around the machinery, removing dust and lint during the spinning process. The blowers were blowing too hard for the weight of the new yarns, causing the yarn ends to blow around, get stuck together, and pull the bobbins over. With a simple adjustment, Buhler was able to solve the problem and create substantial increases in production on the three frames causing the issue. The solution is saving the company hundreds and thousands of dollars that would otherwise be lost to waste, and improving efficiency in crucial areas of the plant.

RESULTS

- Increased production on three frames by an average of 9.5%
- Saved $405,000 per year in waste due to lost production
- Improved efficiency in the winding department by approximately 16%

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"GaMEP really helped our team to work together. They helped us solve the problem, but they also taught us a system to solve problems on our own and continue to improve."

-Russell Mims, Vice President, Operations